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ABSTRACT

Recertification of teachers, in other subject areas or for other grade levels, can become an important response to the oversupply of teachers in certain subject areas. By successfully completing a formal training program in a different subject area, teachers certified in one specialty can be licensed to teach in another, leading to the possibility of multicertification and a new concept of what a teacher ought to be. However, questions on the applicability and morality of recertification abound and must be addressed. If it becomes increasingly likely that teachers will be required to be competent in more than one discipline, a new look at what is known about the structure of subject matter and learning is required. Criteria for selecting teachers to be retrained should be considered, as well as the characteristics of retraining programs. In urban areas, recertification can help alleviate the "last hired" syndrome and provide answers for mid-career rejuvenation. Several arguments can be raised against recertification, such as the question of its effects on recruitment of new teachers and the principle of maintaining a natural supply and demand job market. (FG)

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"New Prospects for the Profession"

AACTE Conference

Houston, February 19, 1982

Madeleine J. Long

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For more than one half of the twentieth century positions were varied and abundant in the teaching profession; and, the teacher's future was secure in whatever discipline or level was selected. Within the past decade, however, thousands of qualified and experienced individuals who once were teachers, or are about to be "once were," have been forced to search for new ways to put their talents to use. It is not important to remind them that oversupply should have been predictable and that demands will inevitably shift from one curriculum area to another. What is critical is to help the competent and talented among them to secure positions in the profession they have chosen and to make certain that such a situation is not likely to repeat itself.

Recertification, the result of successful completion of a formal training program in a subject area different from the one for which the teacher was originally trained and licensed, is one important way of retaining the services of the very best teachers and of filling the most critical vacancies. Recertification implies completion of coursework and of any other local or state requirements prior to the issuance of a teaching license in the new field. This process of recertification will be explored, with a particular focus placed upon the questions of whether it is a responsible and reasonable way to make use of existing talent and respond to the critical need for teachers, particularly in areas which have traditionally demanded rigorous specialization. If recertification is effective, and if the situation which created it is bound to continue, it would seem to lead, almost inevitably, to the concept of multi-certification and to a new vision of what a teacher ought to be.

The Board of Education of the City of New York signaled the need for a specific retraining program approximately seven years ago when it laid off thousands of elementary

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school teachers and teachers of subjects like the social studies, while it simultaneously announced a critical shortage of teachers in mathematics and science. Thus, the largest school system in the United States announced its intention to give first priority for job openings to its own laid off teachers rather than seek new recruits formally and traditionally trained in mathematics and science. An obscure law, New York State Law, Section 2588, "discovered" by the Board's Executive Personnel Director, empowered the Board to do so through the recertification process.[1] Clearly, the Board was interested in retaining experienced teachers - although there was no initial evidence to suggest that it was searching for the most able or best qualified from among those who had been laid off.

The immediate problems recertification might create were quite serious: salaries might escalate; far fewer new teachers would be brought into the system; the wrath of schools of education was to be incurred as the move made it more difficult for them to gain new recruits; and the profession might take a "nosedive" as it was accused of anti-intellectualism and of ignoring the traditional sanctity of individual disciplines. (Interestingly, those education departments which took the initial lead in developing retraining programs were criticized by other departments of education rather than by the liberal arts and science departments.) Those colleges and universities still willing to respond to the need have faced a profound challenge and their responses hold the potential for creating a new model for teacher training.

In what follows the concept of recertification will be examined more closely, particularly those questions concerned with the kind of teacher the process ought to require; the effects it is likely to have on both basic core curriculum and professional education courses; its problemmatic and controversial aspects; and its fundamental strengths and weaknesses. A model program to train primarily elementary school teachers, social studies teachers of business subjects as high school mathematics teachers will be presented. In

conclusion questions concerning the wisdom and morality of selecting the process of recertification as the major response to those problems created by a severely fluctuating market; the desirability or treating as one, layoffs and shortages, that which some may regard as two distinct problems; and the need to create other alternatives to recertification and other answers to the problem(s) will be addressed.

One may agree to recertification on the grounds that it is expedient at the time, but if it is to become a process worthy of repetition and imitation, the following assumptions must be accepted: (1) the idea of <u>teaching</u> is primary and the art of teaching involves particular abilities and characteristics which transcend grade levels and subject matter; (2) the experience of the teacher is at least as critical as knowledge of subject matter; (3) thinking is a process which can be consciously learned and consciously improved. Regardless of level or subject, the very good teachers are curious, eager, imaginative and intelligent; enjoy learning and performing; are interested in people; understand their audiences; display a sense of humor; are aware of and participate in the world around them; question established solutions and responses; and present themselves as "personalities". At this juncture all that will be admitted is that very good teachers are immediately visible and recognizable. Whether they can or ought to be defined is left to other people to decide on another occasion. Certainly the tendency to develop a checklist of attributes and characteristics and then rate them on a scale of one to five should be resisted; what is not needed is simplistic reductionism or another network of finite "competencies," the successful achievement of which would signify mastery. It is the "very good teachers" who are candidates for recertification, their experience which ought not to be lost. If a teacher possesses many of these traits he should be more valuable to a school system than a new teacher - both because there has been an opportunity to verify the traits "in person" and because the teacher has had the opportunity to practice and apply, to finely hone, his talents.

Given the presence of "appropriate traits" and experience, how important is subject matter, or the ability to think in a specific discipline? Most epistemologists maintain that there are objective differences in forms of knowledge and in an understanding of the mental processes which are related to them. Most also recognize the possibility of different forms and the inevitable changes which will occur in the ways they will be identified in future years. What they sometimes disagree on are the categories to be identified as the specific forms or structures of knowledge. For example, Marc Belth identifies four structures: poetic (or aesthetic), historical, scientific and social scientific,[2] while P. H. Hirst recognizes mathematics, physical science, human science, philosophy, morals, history, religion, and literature and the fine arts.[3] Although thinking is a process which can be taught and improved, it is entirely likely that the success of retraining programs will rest, in part, upon a critical selection of subject matter or disciplines which, in turn, will be based upon the particular epistemological - and psychological - positions accepted as correct. Is it in fact true that a person trained in chemistry is more likely to be a successfully retrained physicist than one who had originally trained in economics, and that the economist is more likely to succeed as a chemistry teacher than the person who originally trained in English literature? Answers to such questions will be dependent, in part, upon the theories one holds to be true regarding structure of subject matter and how people learn.

If it is increasingly likely that a teacher will be required to be competent in more than one discipline, a new look at what is known about the structure of subject matter and ways of knowing is required. Thus far, evidence amassed from one specially designed program <u>does</u> indicate that certain experienced teachers who have had little background in a specific discipline can master that discipline sufficiently in one year of intensive training to pass a license examination and teach the appropriate subject matter the second year. It is necessary to examine whether this could have been predictable had there

been sufficient time to "research the problem," and whether what has been done in this instance is transferrable to other similar situations.

When one has agreed to the concept of retraining and the subsequent development of a specific program, three factors emerge which are of primary importance: (1) the selection of teachers; (2) the subject matter to be mastered; and (3) the situation in which the retrained teacher is to be placed. Before a teacher is selected as a candidate for retraining, fellow teachers and supervisors should be interviewed and classes he has taught should be observed. Has this teacher appeared as more than "merely competent" when viewed against the "criteria" set forth on page four? Is he adaptable in new situations? Is he eager to remain a teacher? Why? What were his undergraduate interests? What kinds of courses were chosen as electives? What disciplines were selected as minors? What extracurricula events were participated in? Examine the teacher's grades and the pattern of those grades. Compare the college transcript to the high school record and the scores on tests like the Scholastic Achievement Test with grades achieved in particular courses. Since his first appointment as a teacher, what subjects and/or grade levels has he taught? What kinds of questions does he ask? What makes him laugh? What makes him angry? What does he read? Checklists for selection will not do, but tools created by psychologists to ascertain how adults learn and what factors most influence that learning would be helpful. In fact, by stressing the teacher's need to know, one inadvertantly underscores the fact that learning is - or should be - a lifelong process, and makes it more difficult for psychologists to stress one period of adjustment and development, say early childhood or adolescence, and ignore others. (An interesting side effect of recertification might be the creation of a non dependence upon the educational psychologist and the learning theorist.)

Any consideration of retraining must concern the subject matter to be mastered as well as the teacher to be selected. Within the discipline for which retraining is re-

quired, a critical area of knowledge, its core, that which is most fundamental to it even though it may never be taught in the classroom, must be identified. For example, later today the idea of the calculus is shown to be the core of mathematics and that around which an entire program was developed, despite the fact that most teachers never teach calculus in high school. It is also important to set the proper level of attainment for the formal period of the retraining program. It might be that the retrained teacher will be able to perform certain teaching tasks better than the one who is inexperienced although trained in the specific discipline to be taught. Likewise, it might be unwise and counterproductive to expect him to achieve a level, at the end of a year or two, where he is able to teach college placement courses.

The third factor, the situation in which the retrained teacher is placed, is inextricably interwoven with problems related to subject matter mastery. As a process, recertification is likely, although not necessarily, to require less exposure to subject matter than majoring in the area would require. A school system which failed to place graduates of a recertification program selectively, and failed to insist on further study beyond State Education Department course and credit requirements, would impede the success of the program. Further, the system must provide for sophisticated personal, group and career counseling, and must consider the need to increase the responsibility given to school supervisors and administrators and to college personnel, all of whom should work with the retrained teachers during their first few years in the new position. Universities which do not plan programs in cooperation with teachers and administrators, and who overlook the fact that they will be dealing with experienced pedagogues, inexperienced in a particular field, risk failure as do school districts which fail to cooperate with the appropriate state agencies and local union chapters.

Recertification is one particular response to problems which have been created by changing job markets within the teaching profession, one which permits school systems to retain their experienced teachers and to secure from among them teachers for under-

staffed disciplines. One can say, with the force of history as evidence, that job markets in teaching will continue to shift. Recall that as the result of federal legislation, bilingual/bicultural teachers have had almost limitless opportunities during the last decade in particular geographical regions of the United States. Likewise as the result of federal legislation, special educators have their choice of positions during the first part of the 1980's. Resulting from a different set of circumstances, there has been and remains a critical shortage of mathematics and physical science teachers. And now in New York City, a shortage of English and vocational education teachers has been announced.

At the other end of the spectrum, new social studies teachers and guidance counsellors are considered unnecessary at present. The "message" is simple: no curriculum area is immune to oversupply or undersupply, and the more areas in which persons can secure expertise, the more likely they are to remain teachers. But is this situation wholesome? Ought it to be encouraged? Beyond its ability to respond quickly to immediate needs, what are the advantages of recertification programs - and, just as important, what are their disadvantages?

For a very tired, sagging, defensive profession recertification can lead to rejuvenation as it brings about fundamental changes in the ways in which future teachers are trained and licensed. For instance, if the present situation is bound to continue, why not build the necessary conditions for proper retraining directly into the undergraduate curriculum? The fact that teachers might be called upon to teach subjects as diverse as English literature and mathematics seems to be sufficient reason for supporting the concept of a "liberal education." Perhaps university faculties can even be forced to look at more cogent reasons than those of their own oversupply in a given discipline when attempting to decide what should be required of all students.

The professional education sequence must also be examined. Most simply, educational psychology courses and methods courses might be forced to treat adjustment, leadership

and development through adulthood and to attend to the learning styles of all age groups. Introductory courses might be required to introduce prospective students to experience working with various age levels, and field work courses, including student teaching, might insist upon experience at more than one level and in more than one subject. Slightly more difficult to bring about would be fundamental cooperation among the arts and sciences faculty and professional educators, the kind of cooperation which results from the fact that each group must employ the knowledge and experience gained through study in the other's area. The arts and science faculty would then have to pay more attention to why certain examples are selected and how certain concepts should be taught, and to the individual differences existent in a particular class and the ways in which they should affect the mode of instruction. The "uses" of knowledge might be made clearer and more specific, thereby rendering the product, the student, more willing to invest his time in study. The educator, on the other hand, would be forced to attend to the knowledge his students have amassed in other courses because he would have to use it!

Recertification can have implications for the development of new core curricula, new professional education courses, and a new stress on practical activity. It can also give rise to a different kind of teacher, one who is prepared both to teach at more than one level and more than one subject, and to add increasingly to his reportorie so long as he remains in teaching. In fact, a well trained master elementary school teacher might become the appropriate model for all teachers. If an elementary school teacher can be trained to teach a variety of disciplines, why shouldn't the high school teacher be required to specialize in more than one discipline? And why do we not ask the elementary school teacher, who is particularly adept in, say English literature or history, to teach that subject at the junior or senior high school level? Where was it written that teachers should be trained to work forever with one age group or that certificates must be granted for grades nursery through six, or nine through twelve? Why do we permit

high school teachers "to go to sleep" after having amassed the required number of credits in a given area? And how ill-timed was the recent New York State Education Department's ruling that teachers must pursue master's degrees in fields functionally related to their certification area. While most educators applauded this ruling because of its assumed consistency (and perhaps because it increased the number of education courses prospective teachers would be forced to take), they ignored the fact that it would impede growth in the direction of "multicompetence." Now, in New York State, teachers are no longer able to pursue a degree in whatever area they wish; for example, a mathematics teacher might be permitted to study for a degree in physics, but never in English literature. And few saw the irony! Recertification not only calls attention to the need to be more creative when considering what teachers can and should study; it helps to underscore the relatedness of knowledge and thus can help to bridge the external chasm between the sciences and the humanities or the arts.

Thoughts about the implications of recertification have raised sharp questions about what has been assumed in theory but often ignored in practice, namely, that one must major in the appropriate discipline to teach it at the high school level. It might be time to consider a radical transformation in the way teachers are certified or licensed, a transformation which is foreshadowed by the fact that in New York State teachers of Reading, Special Education, Business subjects and English As a Second Language, are certified for kindergarten through the twelfth grade. It would seem important to require teachers for the nineteen nineties to be <u>conversant with</u> all major disciplines and <u>specialists</u> in two or three, and to be capable of teaching within their specializations at all grade levels. They might even be required to change assignments every five years and to pursue formal education periodically throughout their lifetimes as teachers. The question of whether it is necessary for teachers to be scholars primarily, to approximate the training of the college professor and, as most professors do, remove themselves

from the breadth of the many disciplines while seeking specialization within one, must be raised and debated. The argument made in this paper certainly leads one perilously close to proclaiming that experience is at least as important as expertise, and that teaching and scholarship, although still inseparable, ought to receive a different emphasis then they now do.

Even if recertification does not lead to a transformation, it will undoubtedly, if taken seriously, alter the ways in which teachers are selected and trained and, by so doing, force the most able to surface in a time of overabundance. This process has even suggested a solution to a problem educators have wrestled with for the entire century, that of reward and advancement for the practitioner. The concept of merit does not really exist in teaching and certainly seems to be anethema to most Union positions. Advancement presently requires the exchange of roles, that of teacher for supervisor or administrator. If teachers who were trained in more than one area and who were willing to change grade level assignments were rewarded with both salary and recognition, with "promotion" within the profession, perhaps the profession might attract its share of the "gifted population" after all! It is interesting to note the similarities in positions taken by Alvin Toffler in The Third Wave, and some of the requirements recertification calls for. Toffler describes a society in which work becomes less fragmented and the "new worker" is required to perform somewhat larger tasks, to cope with more frequent changes in his tasks and with a succession of reorganizations.[4]

> What Third Wave employers increasingly need, therefore, are men and women who accept responsibility, who understand how their work dovetails with others', who can handle larger tasks, who adopt swiftly to changed circumstances and are sensitively tuned in to the people around them.[5]

Recertification has still other spin-off benefits. In certain regions, urban regions in particular, it helps maintain the services of minorities who often were among the last groups hired and, thus, would be the first to be fired. It creates opportuni-

ties for "mid-career rejuvenation" and is also a means of promoting continuing education among teachers. For schools of education it holds the promise of an organic role in in-service education and introduces the possibility of viewing pedogogy as a discipline. Most important, recertification can open new vistas. It arose as a response to immediate problems, but demographic, social and economic data indicate that the contitions which engendered it will continue. If this is the case, it makes little sense to stop with retraining for recertification; rather, dual or multi-certification programs initiated at the undergraduate, pre-service level, must be developed. In fact, most of what has been argued here would have little relevance if not for the need to preplan conditions most likely to insure flexibility, adaptability, and ability in more than one area.

Despite the strengths of recertification, certain problems and weaknesses do exist and must be recognized; and many questions remain to be answered, as does the need to evoke a new round of questions. It can still be argued, despite the position taken here that a process which requires less exposure to subject matter than majoring in the field would demand is anti-intellectual and may not produce the preferred level of competence. The fact that a teacher's experience is held to be as important as his knowledge of subject matter can also be questioned and, depending upon the course and the level at which it is taught, can be a very damaging argument. It can also be argued that a commitment to recertification will severely impede the recruitment of new teachers. Then, too, one might want to question whether the problem of scarcity in certain disciplines ought to be, or must necessarily be, tied to the problem of oversupply and layoffs in other disciplines.

Before one decides to jump on another bandwagon, as many educators too often seem too happy to do, it is necessary to reflect on recertification - and also on multi-

certification - to examine the evidence available for existing recertification programs and to research areas which bear on recertification. For example, attention must be focused upon: the compatability of disciplines; characteristic traits of teachers which are most likely to result in success; a comparative study of how different age groups learn; and the kind of core curriculum which helps develop a student's ability to teach successfully in various disciplines. Lastly, other ways of addressing the problems created by simultaneous oversupply and undersupply and teacher layoffs should be considered.

Footnotes

1. McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York, Annotated (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1970), p. 85.

2. Marc Belth, The Process of Thinking (New York: David McKay Co., 1977), p. xi.

3. P. H. Hirst, "Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge," in Education and Reason, Part 3 of Education and the Development of Reason edited by R. F. Dearden, P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters (Boston: Ron Hedge and Keagan Paul, 1972), pp. 17-18.

4. Alvin Toffler, "A New Kind of Man in the Making," in The New York Times Magazine (New York: March 9, 1980), p. 25.

5. Ibid.